



# PREVENTION TALK

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY INTERVENTION

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Schools are in a great position to spot problems early and offer a helping hand to youth who engage in risky behavior involving alcohol and drugs, by providing early intervention to these youth. Parents can strengthen this safety net with good home/school communication. Early intervention is defined as taking the opportunity to prevent a progression to addiction. Efforts are targeted toward individuals or groups already involved with substance use or at increased risk of developing substance abuse problems. Prevention programs are available at the preschool through high school levels. Active parent involvement at all ages expands the ability of schools to collaborate with families to meet student needs. Addressing risk factors as soon as they are noticed often has a greater impact than delaying the intervention. Intervening early may change a child's life path away from problems and toward positive behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

### REMEMBER:

*It's not a mistake to inquire, "Are you having difficulty? Does it involve drinking or drugs?"*

Intervention programs aim to enhance protective factors, as well as reduce or reverse risk factors. Strategies for schools include utilizing student health centers and student assistance programs to provide structured assessments of individual students. Combining two or more effective programs, such as school-based and family-based programs can be more effective than a single program alone.<sup>2</sup> Partnerships with community organizations offering family skills training, supportive services, and systemic interventions promote a consistent and healthy community environment for students and families.

**For more information call:**

### TO THINK ABOUT:

- Early intervention is more effective with these components: skill-building activities for parents and children, culturally appropriate content, a focus on building on family strengths, offering incentives for participation, and addressing the relationship between substance abuse and other health issues.<sup>3</sup>
- Early use is associated with serious problems, rather than just being a phase out of which teens mature. Moreover, we now have good evidence that adolescent females are at a higher risk for dependence than any other age group of women.<sup>4</sup>
- Education and skill building at an early age have been proven by research to reduce unhealthy and self-destructive behaviors later in life.<sup>5</sup>

### ACTION STEPS:

- Contact your PTA or school advisory council, and urge them to support forming a multidisciplinary team to evaluate, screen, and refer students to the type of supportive service best suited to the student's situation.
- Initiate discussions with other parents and local professionals to increase knowledge and awareness of issues which can put youth at risk for substance use, such as mental health and child abuse/neglect, especially if they are not being addressed.

### SOURCES:

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- <sup>2</sup> Battistich, V., Solomon, D., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1997). Caring school communities. *Educational Psychologist*, 32(3), 137-151.
- <sup>3</sup> CSAP's Northeast Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies (CAPT). (2002) Early intervention: a strategy for prevention practitioners. Retrieved October 14, 2004, from <http://www.northeastcapt.org/products/strategies/intervention/earlyinterventionpaper.html>
- <sup>4</sup> Monti, P.M. (2002). Adolescents and substance use: problems, progress and promise. Retrieved October 25, 2004 from Join Together Online, a project of the Boston University School of Public Health Web site: <http://www.jointogether.org/sa/news/features/reader/0,1854,547790,00.html>
- <sup>5</sup> Botvin, G., Baker, E., Dusenbury, L., Botvin, E., & Diaz, T. (1995). Long-term follow-up results of a randomized drug-abuse prevention trial in a white middle class population. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 273, 1106-1112.